



## Monthly Information Package Guatemala

Number 255 - December 2024

### 1. THE CURRENT SITUATION

*Monthly update on the situation in Guatemala as highlighted by the press, related to the main thematic areas of PBI Guatemala's work: the fight against impunity, land issues and defense of territory.*

#### **Worrying situation for journalism in Guatemala**

In November 2024, during the 190<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), a report was released by 25 press freedom and human rights organizations in the Americas entitled *Impact of State Censorship Measures on the Right to Freedom of Expression in the Americas*. It identifies “the strategies used by governments and other actors to silence the press,” highlighting “stigmatization, the use of technology to monitor and surveil journalists, and judicial harassment.”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, in late 2024, *La Red Rompe el Miedo Guatemala* (Break the Fear Network Guatemala), an alliance of local and international organizations, published the results of its report on attacks against community journalists during the first half of the year. The report “reflects a hostile and dangerous environment for journalism in Guatemala. The Network documented multiple types of violence over this period, with the main perpetrators being agents of the State, including public officials and the National Civil Police (PNC). Rather than fulfilling their responsibility to protect the press, these actors have been identified as the main perpetrators of attacks, which include intimidation, threats, judicial harassment and restrictions on news coverage. One of the most worrying findings is that most cases go unreported, due to distrust in the justice system and fear of reprisal. The Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) failure to investigate these cases sends a message of impunity, which further perpetuates violence against the press.”<sup>2</sup>

At the end of 2024, “José Carlos Zamora, son of the journalist and *elPeriódico* founder Jose Rubén Zamora, participated in the Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council dialogue on the status of persons deprived of liberty for political reasons in the Americas. During his speech, he spoke out about the existence of a ‘manual of repression’ used by regimes in the region to silence opponents, activists and journalists, highlighting the case of Guatemala.” Zamora condemned this mechanism and explained that “it begins with the MP manufacturing a spurious case in record time, followed by unilateral hearings held by complicit judges,” just as was done in the case against his father and in the case of journalist Juan Luis Font.”<sup>3</sup>

Apart from these cases, it is important to highlight the case against eight journalists who were part of *elPeriódico* and who faced prosecution by the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECI) in February 2023 for alleged obstruction of justice, related to their publications on José Rubén Zamora's trial. These eight people have been forced to go into exile.<sup>4</sup>

The most recent case of criminal prosecution is that of *La Hora* journalist Diego España. He reported on the actions of MP and judicial branch employees, and is now being investigated for violence against women, with the Femicide Law used to criminalize and prosecute him.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pérez, R., [Informe regional evidencia tres tipos de censura contra la prensa](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 29.11.2024.

<sup>2</sup> Red Rompe el Miedo Guatemala, [Informe de Agresiones contra la Prensa en Guatemala: resultados del Primer Semestre de 2024](#), 01.10.2024.

<sup>3</sup> García J., [José Carlos Zamora denuncia el mecanismo de persecución política en Guatemala ante la OEA](#), epinvestiga, 11.12.2024.

<sup>4</sup> Farfán, M., [2024, el año con más periodistas judicializados por la FECI](#), Agencia Ocote, 11.12.2024.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

### **International arrest warrant issued for five Guatemalan military personnel**

A year after convicting five Guatemalan military officers for the kidnapping, torture and murder of four Belgian missionaries during the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC), the Criminal Court of Leuven (Belgium) has requested the officers' extradition. The military officers are former Minister of Defense Ángel Aníbal Guevara, former Army Chief of Staff Benedicto Lucas García, former Head of Military Intelligence Manuel Callejas y Callejas, former Minister of the Interior Donaldo Álvarez Ruiz and former head of the National Police's Sixth Command Pedro García Arredondo. Currently, Interpol has issued red notices so that they can serve their sentences in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

On December 14, 2023, the organization Guatebelga reported that the Leuven jury had reached a final verdict in the historic trial for the kidnapping and murder of the four Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary missionaries -- Walter Voordeckers, Ward Capiiau, Paul Schildermans and Serge Berten -- in Guatemala. The crimes were committed between May 1980 and January 1982. After unsuccessful efforts by the victims' families to launch legal investigations in Guatemala, they filed a civil lawsuit before the examining magistrate in Brussels in January 2001. The court responsible for this trial, which lasted more than 20 years, ultimately sentenced the five Guatemalan military officers to life imprisonment and ordered their immediate arrest.<sup>7</sup>

According to Guatebelga, this case has its legal basis in the June 16, 1993 Law on the Punishment of Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, as Amended by the Law of February 10, 1999 (known as the Genocide Law) and customary international law. According to these laws, forced disappearance and murder are crimes against humanity if they occur within the context of a policy of systematic repression of the civilian population. Therefore a Belgian judge has jurisdiction to order investigations and to try this type of crime.<sup>8</sup>

On December 10, 2024, International Human Rights Day, Guatebelga expressed solidarity with the victims of the Ixil genocide case and called on the Guatemalan courts to ensure justice for the victims and survivors of the case.<sup>9</sup>

### **December 10, International Human Rights Day**

On International Human Rights Day (December 10), indigenous Ixil women were awarded the Monsignor Juan José Gerardi Human Rights Award by the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala (ODHAG). This award recognizes their struggle to achieve justice and uncover the truth about the genocide committed against the Ixil population during the IAC, from 1980 to 1982 specifically. The women, who are part of the organization *Mujeres Tejedoras de Justicia* (Women Weavers of Justice), stated through their spokesperson Eulalia Juan Juan, that they accept the award as a sign of gratitude for "our resistance, our ideas, our stories and the struggle for a Guatemala where justice will one day exist."<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the IACHR and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also marked International Human Rights Day by issuing a joint statement to seven countries, including Guatemala, calling for an end to the "criminalization of human rights defenders." Both institutions stated that criminalization violates people's fundamental rights. Speaking about Guatemala, High Commissioner Volker Türk said that there has been "a deterioration of systemic and structural inequalities and discrimination" and that "criminal law and its processes are abused by some official actors, such as the Attorney General, Consuelo Porras, to pressure and persecute those involved in defending human rights and promoting accountability." In 2024, increased criminalization was accompanied by an increase in attacks against judicial independence and against human rights defenders, according to the OHCHR. As both institutions point out, criminalization aims to silence human rights defenders and obstruct their work. In Guatemala, this criminalization takes the form of unfounded accusations, as well as the use of intimidation through coercive measures, such as pretrial detention or a ban on leaving the country, among others.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Prensa Comunitaria, [Piden la extradición de militares que asesinaron a sacerdotes belgas](#), 10.12.2024.

<sup>7</sup> Guatebelga, [Press Release](#), 18.12.2023.

<sup>8</sup> Guatebelga, [Press Release](#), 17.05.2022.

<sup>9</sup> Aguilar, D., [Piden extradición de Benedicto Lucas García y otros exmilitares](#), einvestiga, 10.12.2024.

<sup>10</sup> Swissinfo, [Mujeres indígenas son galardonadas en Guatemala por su búsqueda de justicia por genocidio](#), 10.12.2024.

## Poverty and malnutrition in Guatemala<sup>12</sup>

Following 22 years without an update, the Secretariat of Planning and Programming of the Presidency (SEGEPLAN) presented the results of the country's municipal-level general poverty maps on December 12. There are currently 9 million people living in poverty in Guatemala, accounting for more than half of the country's population. The regions with the highest rates of general poverty are the Verapaces, especially Alta Verapaz, where the poverty rate is over 90%, Huehuetenango and Quiché, as well as some municipalities in San Marcos and Totonicapán. Poverty in these regions is a result of unequal access to basic services, education and employment.

One of the main problems that results from this situation is the severe malnutrition that many people, especially children, suffer from, which often leads to death. In fact, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance's (MSPAS) Department of Epidemiology and Risk Management has confirmed that 72 children under 5 died from acute malnutrition in 2024, a 33% increase over 2023. Alta Verapaz (24 deaths as a result of malnutrition), San Marcos (13) and Huehuetenango (12) are the municipalities most heavily affected by this scourge. According to Ministry of Health data, the average national recovery rate for children with acute malnutrition is 79.9 percent.

## 2. ACCOMPANIMENTS<sup>13</sup>

*PBI accompanies social organizations and individuals who have received threats for their work in the defence and promotion of human rights. In this context we are accompanying social processes in the fight against impunity, land inequality and defense of territory.<sup>14</sup>*

### THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY



On December 10, Human Rights Day, we accompanied the **Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR)** to a protest organized by the National Platform of Victims in the Human Rights Plaza, in front of the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ). Participating organizations opened with a Maya ceremony and continued with a press conference. Victims and survivors of the violence committed during the Internal Armed Conflict called for Attorney General Consuelo Porras to resign because she has dismantled the Human Rights Prosecutor's Office and is seeking impunity for the military officers responsible for crimes against humanity. Afterwards, the AJR filed an injunction against the First Appeals Court's decision to remove High Risk Court "A" from the Ixil Genocide case just as the court was about to issue a sentence, following eight months of hearings.

We accompanied the **Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)** and the **Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)** to Petén for a commemoration event, held at the Las Cruces cemetery, on the 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Dos Erres massacre. Both organizations also met with the families of victims of the Dos Erres massacre and the Los Josefinos massacre to update them on the two cases, both at the national level and in the Inter-American Human Rights System.

<sup>11</sup> Ramón, S.A., [La CIDH y Oficina del Alto Comisionado piden detener la criminalización contra defensores de DDHH](#), Prensa Comunitaria, 09.12.2024.

<sup>12</sup> SEGEPLAN, [SEGEPLAN actualiza los mapas de pobreza después de 22 años sin datos](#), 12.12.2024 y epinvestiga, [Siisan reporta 72 fallecidos por desnutrición aguda](#), 17.12.2024.

<sup>13</sup> We maintained regular contact with accompanied organizations who are not specifically mentioned in this section, but there are no activities to highlight.

<sup>14</sup> See our website for general information on organizations and individuals we accompany: <https://pbi-guatemala.org/en/groups-and-individuals-currently-accompanied-pbi>

On December 20, we accompanied the BDH to a hearing for the continuation of the oral and public hearing phase of the Hogar Seguro case.

With respect to the **Luz Leticia** case, we accompanied her family to an evidentiary hearing on December 17. Unfortunately, the hearing was suspended once again.

### DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

In the department of Chiquimula we accompanied the **Maya Ch'orti' Indigenous Council of Olopa** to a meeting held in the La Prensa community, in which local authorities and community members from Olopa and nearby towns participated and discussed logging in the territory. We were also present at the ceremony when the Council was awarded the Human Rights Tulip, presented to them in recognition of their struggle for the defense of their territory by the Ambassador of the Netherlands, Arjen van den Berg. It was a two-part ceremony: on the 11<sup>th</sup>, a Maya ceremony was held in the La Prensa community and the Ambassador gave a speech in recognition of the community's struggle; on the 12<sup>th</sup>, an activity was held in Guatemala City, which also began with a ceremony and concluded with the physical presentation of the award.



From December 19-21 we visited the department of Retalhuleu, specifically the municipalities of Retalhuleu and Champerico. During this trip we held meetings with the board members of the **Council of Communities of Retalhuleu (CCR)** to get an update on their work and on the situation faced by the different communities that make up the Council with respect to issues like the lack of water and the environmental and health damages caused by sugar cane, oil palm and shrimp farms. We also met with several local authorities to express our concern for the safety of the human rights defenders involved in these struggles.

### THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO LAND

With respect to the **Verapaz Union of Peasant Organizations (UVOC)**, we maintained our regular meetings with general coordinator Carlos Morales to follow up on and stay up to date about the security situation and the organization's work in defense of land access. We continue to monitor the worrying security situation of the Lajeb Kej community, which is still suffering threats and intimidation from a plantation owner in the region.

In addition, we held update meetings and maintained ongoing communication with the leadership of the **Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA) - Verapaces Region**, to stay up to date on their security situation and on the issue of evictions in the region.

### 3. POLITICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

*Meetings and other contact with the diplomatic bodies, international organisations and Guatemalan authorities.*

*Meetings with national and international authorities are an important way for PBI to make known what we do and what our objectives are. Through these meetings, where necessary and in a reserved manner, we share our concerns about worrying situations that we have witnessed first-hand from the work we do in the field.*

With respect to our dialogue with Guatemalan authorities, this month we met with:

- Carlos Amézquita, Executive Director of the **Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights (COPADEH)**.
- Claudia Palencia, Vice Minister of Security of the **Ministry of the Interior (MinGob)**, and Rosibell Chavarría, Legal Advisor and Head of the **Police Anti-Corruption Center (CAP)**.
- Agent Méndez Jiménez, from the **National Civil Police (PNC) station in Olopa**.
- Oscar Cardona, Mayor of the **Municipality of Olopa**.

### 4. ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA OUTSIDE GUATEMALA

*Outside the country we constantly develop and strengthen the network of support for the Guatemalan PBI project, as this is one of the essential tools necessary to protect defenders of human rights. Regional Representatives, the Project Office Coordinator and other members of the committee and the Project Office and national groups of PBI, conduct public relations campaigns with many NGOs, agencies and national governments, parliamentarians and others. In this context we develop actions and public relations campaigns, and / or advocacy aimed at protecting defenders of human rights.*

In December, the European Representative of the project met with Diana Riba i Giner, Member of the European Parliament from the Green political group and President of the **Delegation for Central America of the European Parliament**, as well as with her assistant Sergi Zorrilla Cubbels.

*Together with members of the Human Rights and Democracy Network, she also participated in a meeting with the **Council of the European Union's Working Party for Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (COLAC)**, a group made up of the 27 Member States.*

## 5. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

*In this section we publish statements (some abbreviated) from human rights organisations in which they express their concerns regarding recent events.*

### COMUNICADO

## Guatemala debe retomar la agenda de la paz y rescatar la justicia

*Guatemala, 29 de diciembre de 2024.* Hoy celebramos 28 años de la firma de la paz, un hecho histórico que marcó el fin del conflicto armado interno que causó tanto daño el país. Durante el proceso de paz se lograron importantes acuerdos para la construcción de la paz, la democracia y el desarrollo del país, pero lamentablemente muchos de los acuerdos no se han cumplido o han quedado en el olvido por falta de voluntad política. Siguen pendientes las reformas para garantizar los derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas, el desarrollo rural, los derechos humanos, y la reparación para las víctimas y las comunidades afectadas por la guerra.

El presidente Bernardo Arévalo ha manifestado voluntad política para retomar los Acuerdos de Paz, pero no ha hecho nada concreto para demostrarlo. Después de casi un año de gobierno, no se ha creado el Plan Nacional de Dignificación y Reparación para las víctimas del conflicto armado, el Plan de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas ni el Plan para la Recuperación y Preservación de los Archivos Históricos. Además, el gobierno sigue sin cumplir las medidas de reparación ordenadas por la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos en los casos del conflicto armado.

Por otro lado, nos preocupa la cooptación de la justicia. El nombramiento de Noé Rivera al frente de la Fiscalía de Derechos Humanos pone en riesgo el seguimiento de los casos del conflicto armado. Además, las resoluciones arbitrarias de las Salas de Mayor Riesgo en los casos CREOMPAZ y Genocidio Ixil demuestran que se busca impunidad para los militares responsables del genocidio y las atrocidades del pasado.



Las organizaciones que integramos la Plataforma Nacional de Víctimas expresamos solidaridad con nuestro compañero Miguel Itzep quien está siendo difamado y perseguido injustamente por el Ministerio Público como represalia por su trabajo en favor de las víctimas del conflicto armado. Las instituciones de justicia no se deben utilizar como arma de persecución política ni represalia contra personas que denuncian la corrupción y defienden los derechos humanos.

### **Por lo tanto, exigimos:**

1. Que el presidente Bernardo Arévalo tome acciones concretas para cumplir los Acuerdos de Paz. Particularmente demandamos que apruebe el acuerdo gubernativo para la creación del Plan Nacional de Dignificación y Reparación para las víctimas del conflicto armado y el Plan de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas.
2. Que renuncie la fiscal general Consuelo Porras, y que cese la criminalización y persecución política contra líderes indígenas y defensores de derechos humanos.
3. Que la Corte Suprema de Justicia y la Corte de Constitucionalidad revoquen las decisiones arbitrarias de las Salas de Mayor Riesgo para que los acusados en los casos CREOMPAZ y Genocidio Ixil enfrenten la justicia.
4. Que la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos adopte medidas para que el Estado de Guatemala cumpla las sentencias de los casos del conflicto armado.

**The team of volunteers in PBI Guatemala is currently composed of** Anna Morales Mateu (Spain), Ana Gabriela Ascarrunz Ponce (Bolivia), Sebastián Aguirre Orozco (Colombia), David Félix Azemar (Spain), Giulia Pochini (Italy) and Maria Alemany (Spain).

*All photos published are from PBI*

---

PBI GUATEMALA DOES NOT NECESSARILY IDENTIFY WITH THE OPINIONS AND CONTENT OF THE REPRODUCED ARTICLES AND MEDIA RELEASES.

**GUATEMALA PROJECT  
PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL**

Website: [www.pbi-guatemala.org](http://www.pbi-guatemala.org)

facebook: pbiguatemala

Instagram: pbiguatemala

**Office of the team in Guatemala**

3a Avenida "A" 3-51, Zona 1

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

Phone/ Fax: (+502) 2220 1032

**E-mail:** [equipo@pbi-guatemala.org](mailto:equipo@pbi-guatemala.org)